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FEATURED

TSA able to return forgotten money to Sioux City travelers

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Justin Wan, Sioux City Journal

Passengers go through the TSA security checkpoint at Sioux Gateway Airport in Sioux City on Thursday. TSA screeners found more than \$765,000 left behind in loose change at checkpoints in 2015, but no currency was found at Sioux City's Oct. 1 through March 30.

SIOUX CITY | We're all accustomed to tipping waiters, bartenders and the barista at the coffee shop.

But the screener at the airport security checkpoint?

No, you're not expected to tip the TSA worker for running your carry-on items through the scanner.

But travelers at American airports leave thousands of dollars in loose change behind each year. In 2015, \$765,759.15 was left at Transportation Security Administration checkpoints, much of it in the plastic tubs in which passengers place belongings before passing them through a scanner.

David Dailey, TSA Iowa federal security director, said a quick check of records showed that no change had been found from Oct. 1 through March 30 at Sioux Gateway Airport in Sioux City.

It's not too surprising considering Sioux Gateway's size and lower volume of passengers, Dailey said. Sioux City currently is served by American Airlines, which flies two daily routes to Chicago's O'Hare International Airport and recently added one daily route to Dallas.

"Sioux City is such a small airport, that when passengers leave something in the bins, the security officers are able to get it to them right away," Dailey said.

That's not always possible in major international airports in which large numbers of passengers are passing through busy security checkpoints. When officers find money in bins, the passenger is usually long gone.

In an airport like Sioux Gateway, the screening area is near the departure gate. If someone does leave something behind, security officers don't have to look too far for the owner.

"Sioux City is a smaller operation, so they're able to step in and return those items," Dailey said.

In all of Iowa's airports, a total of \$1,932.74 in change was left at checkpoints in 2015. Nationally, the highest total was \$55,086.39 at Los Angeles International Airport. Money collected in Sioux City and elsewhere is documented and deposited into a special fund account used for civil aviation security.

Leaving that change behind could be a conscious choice when hurrying to get through the long, busy line in a crowded airport, but the main reason is likely forgetfulness, said Carrie Harmon, TSA spokeswoman.

"I think most people take it out, put it in the bowl and they forget to pick it up with their other items," Harmon said.

Money isn't the only thing travelers leave at checkpoints. Harmon said laptops are commonly left behind, but in most cases, passengers realize they forgot them while proceeding to their gates and return to claim them.

Harmon said that if an item has identification on it, the TSA tries to find the owner to return it. Obviously, she said, spare change doesn't have that identification, making it nearly impossible to return.

5 airports that collected most loose change

\$55,086.39

Los Angeles International Airport

\$50,955.58

Miami International Airport

\$43,715.81

John F. Kennedy International Airport, New York

\$38,770.86

San Francisco International Airport

\$32,729.48

McCarran International Airport, Las Vegas

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